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ABSTRACT

Little has been written to aid the classroom teacher in developing learning strategies for gifted children. These children need mentally superior teachers whose ingenuity and imagination enable them to suggest stimulating activities, provide children with a feeling of enterprise and optimism, and nurture children's development. The gifted child also needs early identification so that he may be teamed with other bright children or be given individualized reading materials, and he must be allowed to progress at his own pace. Various classroom learning activities which enrich the gifted program include building a list of unusual words which can be discussed and used, playing Scrabble, creating crossword puzzles, writing an imaginary diary, conducting spontaneous discussions, recording a humorous short story, planning an advertising tape, and doing research. Special art and music activity centers in the classroom may provide additional learning stimulants. It is most important that the teacher always be receptive to the gifted child's expressions of ideas and suggestions. (JM)

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Talent Will Out!

What are we doing to the gifted

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Theme The Teacher: Key to Excellence in Reading

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Every school whether large or small has gifted children. The word gifted in and of itself has no absolute meaning. It has been used interchangeably with such words as superior, bright, and talented. Witty(11) terms the gifted as those "Whose performance in any valuable line of human activity is constantly or repeatedly remarkable".

While the word gifted is not a precise term, it is important to remember that one-sixth of the population has an IQ or 130 or above, and and IQ of 130 is as far away from the average as is one of 70! Most writers include in the gifted group not over 5 per cent of the population.

Most unfortunate is it that there has been much talk but relatively little action concerning the gifted. Yet even the finest seeds require careful cultivation to secure high yields. And Syphers (8) tells us that "Intelligence is 'learned' when the environment is rich in experiences that stimulate development. And for the same reason intelligence may be blighted by deprivation."

Indeed the gifted are children with special needs. However, there is no one criterion by which they can be grouped so that they are alike. Interestingly enough, when children are grouped physically according to height and weight, they can vary as much as four years. As Worcester (13) points out: "To insist that all children do the same things because they have lived the same number of years is as unrealistic as to insist that all of a given age wear the same size suit!" Terman's studies (5) show highly intelligent children tend to be a little taller, more healthy and somewhat

better adjusted socially than the average. Therefore, a criterion for average is not how long a child has lived but instead his level of development.

If a gifted child does not have the incentive to be excellent, he may begin to perceive himself as average and will function at that level. He will think up ways of "getting by" with little effort rather than developing a learning style to enhance his giftedness.

Martinson (6) strongly recommends that gifted children be identified in the primary grades since an older child has learned to substitute means for satisfying needs, while the young child is much more dependent on the teacher, and the avenues she provides for independent learning. Therefore, teacher selection become critical.

What are the characteristics of teachers who can work most effectively with gifted? First, they need to be mentally superior themselves. Bright children need bright teachers. They need teachers who have an eagerness to learn, ingenuity in suggesting activities or projects in which these children are interested, and willingness to "find" the time to work with them. They need teachers who can give them a feeling of enterprise and optimism. Their teachers must possess a lot of energy and strong devotion. They must want to nurture the development of another person who may become more proficient then themselves. As Leonardo da Vinci stated so well: "The disciple who does not surpass his master fails his master."

With the right teacher, education for the gifted could function in a one-room school since here is a natural avoidance of grade levels. Bright children can move forward at their own pace without experiencing learning gaps. Today's counterpart is the true primary school. Here two or three grade-ages are together as a unit, and the bright child is permitted to move forward at his own rate. Rapid progress permits systematic and sequential learning, while skipping a grade leaves learning gaps. However, as Worcester (13) points out the danger of skipping is far less than that of doing nothing. In order to provide for rapid progress or early admission to school, the entire school system must be sensitive to the needs of the gifted since these are administrative rather than teacher decisions.

Therefore, in many schools the responsibility for the gifted has rested and does rest primarily with the classroom teacher. She is the one who must possess the ingenuity and imagination to provide for them. However, since teachers have had to spend so much time servicing the special needs of the lower third of the class, provisions for gifted children have not had a high priority.

In addition, teachers have received little professional help with respect to the gifted. While the literature contains information concerning indentification and screening of the gifted as well as various practices with respect to possible school-wide or systemwide programming, little has been written to specifically help the classroom teacher with learning strategies for these children. Yet she is the one who is directly responsible to them.

These are the children who very often have taught themselves to read before they come to school. Placed in readiness programs or pre-primers they become disillusioned with school. They go home disappointed with little to tell. One first grade boy refused to discuss school with his parents. His advanced, independent reading ability was noted. He was invited to visit the principal's office where he read fluently in third grade materials and completed advanced skills pages dealing with inference and critical thinking. That night he went home and, with enthusiasm, attempted to reproduce the pages he had completed that day! By combining enrichment and acceleration, this pupil's learning needs were met.

In order for classroom teachers and specialists to better meet the needs of gifted children, the following suggestions for teaching should be considered.

1. Personality characteristics of gifted children differ just as much as those of other children. Some desire to be a part of the group to such an extent that in a traditional classroom setting they dislike being singled out to do more difficult reading or work on special projects. Their peer relationships hinge on doing what everyone else is doing.

Therefore, early identification of gifted children is most important so that, whenever numbers permit, they can work together as a team or in a small group. In this way they are part of the regular classroom setting.

2. In classrooms where only one child has very superior reading ability, teachers have let the child go to another classroom, at a higher level, for reading. Often this presents problems in pupil attitude, in scheduling, and in the use of reading materials. To circumvent this and to better meet the needs of the child, a carefully planned individualized reading program involving more than one child and a variety of books would provide a better learning environment. Then the gifted child is not being singled out, but instead has the option to work alone or with a partner.

3. Extensions for gifted children can be as varied as the pupil's and teacher's imaginations permit. The following are suggested extensions which have worked well with bright or gifted children.

- Finding Way-out Words and building a "way-out" work list based on difficult or unusual words found in reading. This can be encouraged by not insisting that every word be located in the dictionary! Instead, tell and talk over some of these word meanings. Have fun with them!

- Another technique is to give a pupil a two or three-inch notebook ring or shower curtain loop and let him write each word he selects on a punched word card. When he finds out something about the word or is able to use it, he can write the word in a Personal Anthology Book. This is actually an alphabetical listing with blank pages.

- Playing Scrabble using alphabetized word lists as an aid or building simple crossword puzzles using graph paper. (See sample on next page.)

+ Words to be used are written horizontally and vertically on the graph paper.

Building Your Own Crossword Puzzle

Graph Paper - Horizontal

cut→	g	r	a	s	s	
cut→	c	r	o	w	d	
cut→	s	p	r	i	n	g
cut→	p	i	p	e	s	
cut→	t	r	a	i	n	
cut→	c	a	g	e		
cut→	m	u	s	i	c	
cut→	p	l	a	c	e	
cut→	a	c	o	r	n	s

Vertical

↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
g	c	s	p	t	c	m	p	a
r	r	p	i	r	a	u	l	c
a	o	r	p	a	g	s	a	o
s	w	i	e	i	e	i	c	r
s	d	n	s	n		c	e	n
		g						s

Final Puzzle Pattern

		m		c	r	o	w	d		
		u		a						
		s		g						
p	i	p	e	s				a		
		c		p	l	a	c	e		
				r				o		
				i				r		
t	r	a	i	n				n		
				g	r	a	s	s		

Puzzle Past-Up

		1 m		2 c	r	o	w	d		
		u		a						
		s		g						
3 p	i	p	e	s				4 a		
		c		5 p	l	a	c	e		
				r				o		
				i				r		
6 t	r	a	i	n				n		
				7 g	r	a	s	s		

Clues

Across

2. Many people together
3. water goes through _____.
6. A market is a busy _____.
7. Many people can ride on a ____.
8. Bugs hide in the _____.

Down

1. A lovely sound
2. A lion is kept in a _____.
4. A season of the year
5. The seeds of oak trees

Puzzle designed by
Dorothy Batty
Lynnfield Public Schools
Lynnfield, Mass.

+ Words are cut, manipulated and pasted on typing paper. As a horizontal word is used, its vertical counterpart is put aside to prevent duplication.
+ Pupils may work with partners when constructing puzzle and writing clues.
+ Pattern of puzzle is then transferred to a clean sheet of graph paper and clues copied.
+ The puzzle paste-up becomes the correcting copy.

- Writing an imaginary diary using an interesting personality from a story, movie, or television program. To keep interest high, entries can be short, and the span of time that the diary is kept limited to three or four days.

- Writing another chapter or changing a chapter in a book. The chapter can be any time, any place in the story.

- Conducting "on the spot" discussions. Advertise on chalkboard or bulletin board for two or three people who have also read the same book, listened to the same program, or shared the same experience. Before you advertise, get some "question starters" ready for discussion. Emphasize how and why as good question starters rather than who-what-where.

- Taping or recording. Begin by selecting a short story, particularly a humorous one, and recording it for others to listen to. Add a question of your own at the end of the taping. Remind pupils to check their media center or library to be sure the book has not already been recorded.

- Planning an advertising tape. Either individually or with a team member, prepare an advertising tape. Remind pupils to give the story title, possibly read a sentence or paragraph from the story and then ask a question. "Would you like to go on an adventure with . . .?" "Have you ever . . . ?" Other children can listen to advertising tape before selecting a book.

- Researching. A good way to encourage bright children to use the media center or library and show them that different kinds of information are both in print and nonprint materials is to eleicit from the child or children questions or topics about which they want more information. Here it is most important to remember that what is exciting to one child may be boring or uninteresting to another, and all bright children are not turned on by the same kinds of activities.

A springboard for question starters is the following excerpt from Kipling's Just So Stories.

I keep six honest
  serving-men
(They taught me all
 I know)
Their names are
  What?
      Why?
  and When?
  and How?
  and Where?
  and Who?

To create interest, questions to be researched must be based on pupil-choices rather than teacher-choices. Pupils should use their media center or library to find out what they want to know and then to record the most important facts under the topic heading on a classroom bulletin board. (Bulletin boards are also effective for building a one-copy classroom newspaper.) In the primary grades emphasis should not be on writing long research reports but instead on mini or capsule reporting.

4. Any classroom that purports to serve the gifted needs, a number of activity or interest centers. Again the ingenuity of the teacher and her ability to capitalize upon children's interest comes into play. Certainly, centers should serve the needs of many different levels of ability, but, if well planned, they usually provide much appeal for the bright or gifted.

- For example, if a small television set with headsets is available, a viewing center can be set up in the classroom. Children can examine the master program schedule and sign up for two or three programs they personally want to view during the week. In all centers pupil-teacher planned ground rules must be defined beforehand.

- Often the music specialist can help the classroom teacher set up a music appreciation center with selected recordings or tapes and books to accompany the music or tell about the composers.

- An art center with odd materials such as sandpaper, nails, yarn, paper plates, egg cartons, beach rocks, balsa wood, macaroni, jar covers, etc. can provide the creative child with many opportunities for boundary pushing experiences.

Most important is it for the teacher to be receptive and tuned in when the child says "I have an idea," or "I have a suggestion," or "Here's a way to do it."

The best program for the gifted is twofold: 1) it permits the child to move forward at his own pace/ and 2) it provides for enrichment which the classroom teacher can realistically carry out! The child is filled with a feeling of enterprise and optimism instead of tacitly being lulled into mediocrity. For only then will talent out!

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